

PREFACE

AMONG the priceless teachings that may be found in the great Hindu poem of the *Mahâbhârata*, there is none so rare and precious as this, “The Lord’s Song.” Since it fell from the Divine lips of Shri Krishna on the field of battle, and stilled the surging emotions of His disciple and friend, how many troubled hearts has it quieted and strengthened, how many weary souls has it led to His Feet. It is meant to lift the aspirant from the lower levels of renunciation where objects are renounced, to the loftier heights where desires are dead, and where the Yogi dwells in calm and ceaseless contemplation, while his body and mind are actively employed in discharging the duties that

fall to his lot in life. That the spiritual man need not be a recluse, that union with the Divine Life may be achieved and maintained in the midst of worldly affairs, that the obstacles to that union lie not outside us but within us—such is the central lesson of the BHAGAVAD GÎTÂ.

It is a Scripture of Yoga: now Yoga is literally Union, and it means harmony with the Divine Law, the becoming one with the Divine Life, by the subdual of all outward-going energies. To reach this, balance must be gained, equilibrium, so that the self, joined to the SELF, shall not be affected by pleasure or pain, desire or aversion, or any of the “pairs of opposites” between which untrained selves swing backwards and forwards. Moderation is therefore the key-note of the GÎTÂ, and the harmonising of all the constituents of man, till they vibrate in perfect attunement with the One, the Supreme SELF. This is the aim the disciple is to set before

him. He must learn not to be attracted by the attractive, nor repelled by the repellent, but must see both as manifestations of the one Lord, so that they may be lessons for his guidance not fetters for his bondage. In the midst of turmoil he must rest in the Lord of Peace, discharging every duty to the fullest, not because he seeks the results of his actions, but because it is his duty to perform them. His heart is an altar, love to his Lord the flame burning upon it; all his acts, physical and mental, are sacrifices offered on the altar; and once offered, he has with them no further concern. They ascend to the Lotus Feet of Ishvara, and, changed by the fire, they retain no binding force on the Soul.

As though to make the lesson more impressive, it was given on a field of battle. Arjuna, the warrior-prince, was to vindicate his brother's title, to destroy a usurper who was oppressing the land;

it was his duty as prince, as warrior, to fight for the deliverance of his nation and to restore order and peace. To make the contest more bitter, loved comrades and friends stood on both sides, wringing his heart with personal anguish, and making a conflict of duties as well as physical strife. Could he slay those to whom he owed love and duty, and trample on ties of kindred? To break family ties was a sin; to leave the people in cruel bondage was a sin; where was the right way? Justice must be done, else law would be disregarded; but how slay without sin? The answer is the burden of the book: Have no personal interest in the event; carry out the duty imposed by the position in life; realise that Ishvara, at once Lord and Law, is the Doer, working out the mighty evolution that ends in bliss and peace; be identified with Him by devotion, and then perform duty as duty, fighting without passion or desire, with-

out anger or hatred ; thus activity forges no bonds, Yoga is accomplished, and the Soul is free. •

Such is the obvious teaching of this sacred book. But as all the acts of an Avatâra are symbolical, we may pass from the outer to the inner planes, and see in the field of Kurukshetra the battle-field of the Soul, and in the sons of Dritarâshtra enemies it meets in its progress ; Arjuna becomes the type of the struggling Soul of the disciple, and Shri Krishna is the Logos of the Soul. Thus the teaching of the ancient battlefield gives guidance in all later days, and trains the aspiring Soul in treading the steep and thorny Path that leads to Peace. To all such Souls in East and West come these Divine lessons, for the Path is one, though it has many names, and all Souls seek the same goal, though they may not realise their unity.

In order to gain something of the precision of the Sanskrit, a few technical but fairly familiar terms have been given in the original; Manas is thus retained, and may be explained for non-Theosophical readers as meaning Mind, both in the lower mental processes in which it is swayed by the senses, by passions and emotions, and in the higher processes of reasoning; Buddhi is the faculty above the ratiocinating mind, and is the Pure Reason, exercising the discriminative faculty of Intuition, of spiritual discernment; if these words are translated in various ways in different passages, as heart, mind, understanding, etc., etc., the BHAGAVAD GÎTÂ loses much of its practical value as a treatise on Yoga, and the would-be learner becomes confused. The adjectival ending "ic" is used in forming adjectives from Sanskrit nouns, although its use is sometimes a barbarism.* Thus Râjasic is used for Râjasa.

To further aid the careful student, original terms are sometimes added in footnotes, where they seem to clarify the meaning. The epithets applied to Shri Krishna and Arjuna—the variety of which is so characteristic of Sanskrit conversation—are for the most part left untranslated, as being musical they thus add to the literary charm, whereas the genius of English is so different from that of Sanskrit, that the many-footed epithets become sometimes almost grotesque in translation. Names derived from that of an ancestor, as Pârtha, meaning the son of Prithâ, Kaunteya, meaning the son of Kuntî, are used in one form or the other, according to the rhythm of the sentence. One other trifling matter, which is yet not trifling if it aids the student; when Âtmâ means the One SELF, the SELF of all, it is printed in small capitals; where it means the lower, the personal self, it is printed in ordinary type; this is done because

there is sometimes a play on the word, and it is difficult for an untrained reader to follow the meaning without some such assistance.

My wish, in adding this translation to those already before the public, was to preserve the spirit of the original, especially in its deeply devotional tone, while at the same time giving an accurate translation, reflecting the strength and the terseness of the Sanskrit. In order that mistakes, due to my imperfect knowledge, might be corrected, all of this translation has passed through the hands of one or other of the following gentlemen—friends of mine at Benares—to whom I here tender my grateful acknowledgments: Bâbus Pramada Das Mittra, Ganganath Jha, Kali Charan Mittra, and Upendranath Basu. A few of the notes are also due to them.

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